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Sustainable development and international economic cooperation: implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development

Twenty-first special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 53/183 of 15 December 1998, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-fourth session a report on the special session for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. The special session took place at United Nations Headquarters from 30 June to 2 July 1999. During its plenary meetings, it was addressed by 152 Member States, 10 observers and 3 non-governmental organizations. At the opening session, the Secretary-General emphasized the connection between population and development and praised the Conference for promoting a fuller understanding of those interactions. He underscored the linkage between sexual and reproductive health and human rights and urged that efforts be made fully to implement the Programme of Action, particularly the financial resource levels agreed to in Cairo in 1994.

2. At the first plenary meeting of its twenty-first special session the General Assembly established an Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole to consider agenda item 8, entitled "Overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development". In connection with its consideration of the agenda item, the Ad Hoc Committee had before it the report of the Commission on Population and Development acting as the Preparatory Committee for the special session. Mr. Anwarul Chowdhury (Bangladesh), who had served as Chairman of the Preparatory Committee, was elected Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee. Over the three-day period, the Ad Hoc Committee held four formal meetings and a number of informal meetings to negotiate the proposals for key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action. During the formal meetings, representatives of 12 United Nations specialized agencies, one intergovernmental organization and 11 non-governmental organizations made statements.

3. At its fourth formal meeting, on 1 July, the Ad Hoc Committee, after negotiations held in the informal meetings, and noting the reservations expressed by the representatives of Argentina and Nicaragua, decided to recommend a text entitled "Proposals for key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development" to the General Assembly and proposed a draft resolution for adoption by the special session. After the adoption of the "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-first Special Session of the General Assembly" (A/S-21/5), five delegations expressed reservations.[1] Subsequently, the closing plenary of the special session adopted by consensus the resolution on key actions (A/S-21/5/Add.1). After the adoption of the resolution, 13 States made interpretive statements or expressed reservations.[2]

4. The present report briefly reviews some aspects and events of the review process and focuses on the key actions contained in document A/S-21/5/Add.1. It also highlights some of the findings regarding progress and constraints in the implementation to date of the Programme of Action.

II. The review and appraisal process

5. The review and appraisal process and the special session were characterized by broad United Nations system-wide participation and the involvement of a wide range of civil society organizations. In particular, there was close collaboration between the Population Division of the Department of Economics and Social Affairs and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). United Nations organizations and representatives of civil society took an active part in the round tables, technical meetings and the International Forum for the Operational Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (February 1999). During the 1998-1999 period, three United Nations inter-agency meetings were held and there were regular periodic briefings for Member States and non-governmental organizations at Headquarters. UNFPA field offices carried out briefings at the country level. This participatory approach and the transparency with which all meetings and negotiations were carried out greatly contributed to the success of the review process and of the special session.

A. Technical meetings and regional consultations

6. The review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action concentrated primarily on policy changes and operational experiences at the country level in order to identify facilitating factors and obstacles encountered during the initial five-year period since the Conference. Those concrete experiences provided a basis for delineating further actions needed to accelerate and fine-tune the implementation of the Programme of Action.

7. Round tables and technical meetings, sponsored by UNFPA, afforded an opportunity for in-depth examination of the implementation of the Programme of Action. These included three round-table meetings on: adolescent reproductive health (14-17 April 1998, New York, United States); reproductive rights and implementation of reproductive health programmes, women's empowerment, male involvement and human rights (22-25 June 1998, Kampala, Uganda); and partnership with civil society to implement the Programme of Action (27-30 July 1998, Dhaka, Bangladesh); and four technical symposiums: international migration and development (29 June-3 July 1998, The Hague, Netherlands); population ageing (6-9 October 1998, Brussels, Belgium); reproductive health services in crisis situations (3-5 November 1998, Rennes, France); and population change and economic development (2-6 November 1998, Bellagio, Italy).

8. Regional consultations, convened by the five United Nations regional commissions, reviewed and appraised the implementation of the Programme of Action. The meetings identified progress achieved and constraints encountered and proposed key future actions for each region in the particular context of the respective regions. A detailed account of the round tables and technical and regional meetings is found in the report submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session (A/53/407). The results of those meetings were available at the time of the special session.

B. The Hague Forum

9. The International Forum for the Operational Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (known as The Hague Forum), held in The Hague, 8-12 February 1999, drew on the outcomes of the technical and regional meetings to formulate operationally pertinent recommendations for the next phases of implementing the Programme of Action. Organized by UNFPA and hosted by the Government of the Netherlands, The Hague Forum brought together a wide range of partners, including ministers and other high-level governmental officials from 177 countries and territories, parliamentarians, representatives of United Nations organizations and specialized agencies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, youth and the media.

10. The Forum was preceded by three meetings of key partner groups committed to the implementation of the Programme of Action — namely, the International Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (4-6 February 1999); the NGO Forum (6-7 February 1999), which gave non-governmental organizations an opportunity to formulate their contribution to the Forum and the special session; and the Youth Forum (6-7 February 1999), convened to examine how implementation of the Programme of Action met the needs of young people.

11. The report of The Hague Forum provided an assessment of progress to date in five substantive areas addressed by its Main Committee:

(a) Creating an enabling environment for further implementation of the Programme of Action;

(b) Enhancing gender equality, equity and empowerment of women;

(c) Promoting reproductive health, including family planning and sexual health, and reproductive rights;

(d) Strengthening partnerships;

(e) Mobilizing and monitoring resources for further implementation of the Programme of Action.

The Forum report identified actions necessary in each of these areas in order to enhance the implementation of the Programme of Action. It was submitted to the Preparatory Committee for the special session and was drawn upon in the preparation of the Secretary-General's report for the special session containing proposals for key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action.

C. UNFPA field inquiry

12. UNFPA conducted a global field inquiry in mid-1998 to assess progress and constraints encountered in the implementation of the Programme of Action. The Inquiry focused on the following key areas: policies and programmes in population and development; gender equality, equity and women's empowerment; reproductive rights and reproductive health care; and government partnerships and collaboration with civil society. A total of 114 responses were received from developing countries and countries with economies in transition, and 18 developed countries reported their experiences.

Progress

13. The report of the 1998 UNFPA field inquiry found concrete results in implementation, including integrating population concerns into development strategies, institutional changes to accommodate the operationalization of the Programme of Action; policy, legislative and institutional changes in the areas of population and

development and reproductive health and rights; recognition of the enhanced role of civil society; an increased involvement of non-governmental organizations; and improved partnership among United Nations agencies and organizations.

14. Countries have begun initiatives to promote the participation of women at policy- and decision-making levels and progress has been made in advocating for the protection of the well-being of the girl-child. Several countries passed legislation outlawing violence against women, with particular focus on the elimination of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation.

15. All countries have accepted the concept of reproductive health, and previously separate family planning programmes are now being integrated into comprehensive reproductive health packages available at the primary health care level. Reproductive health is increasingly considered a priority in health services in emergency situations. Some countries are beginning to address the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents, and some concrete measures have been taken to promote male involvement in sexual and reproductive health through advocacy campaigns. There has been some progress in providing access to a full range of safe and reliable family planning methods, and a wider range of contraceptive choices has become available. There is also greater awareness of the risks of maternal mortality and morbidity and recognition of them as developmental and human rights issues.

16. Recognizing the important role of civil society in implementation of the Programme of Action, many Governments have adopted significant measures to promote the involvement of civil society groups in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring. Some Governments have taken measures to strengthen the institutional capacity of civil society, including the provision of funds and the removal of legal restrictions. Parliamentarians have taken action to adopt legislation on reproductive health and gender-based violence, and they have been instrumental in ensuring provision of national budgetary allocations for population and development.

Constraints

17. A serious lack of financial resources remains one of the primary obstacles to full implementation of the Programme of Action. Donor funding for population activities has stagnated and is far below the required US $17 billion by the year 2000, as agreed to at the Conference.

18. Developing countries have made some progress in increasing the share of domestic budgets allocated to population. Unfortunately, mobilizing domestic resources for financial crises and dislocations have impeded efforts to generate the required resources to implement national population policies and programmes.

19. Despite some progress, socio-cultural factors continue to hinder the full achievement of gender equality and equity. Women still face violence at all stages in their life cycle, and poverty remains disproportionately high among female-headed households. The feminization of poverty has increased such forms of violence as trafficking and forced prostitution. Women are still very much underrepresented in positions of power and decision-making, and they typically earn less than men for work of equal value. In many societies, sons are favoured over daughters when choices have to be made. The lack of coordination mechanisms and funding constraints often preclude more extensive collaboration between government and civil society groups. Often, there are no legal frameworks, regulations or guidelines to facilitate partnerships with non-governmental organizations. Insufficient human and financial resources and a lack of technical capacity in both Governments and non-governmental organizations also impede effective partnerships. The private sector continues to remain underinvolved in population and development activities.

III. The special session

A. Preparatory Committee

20. The Commission on Population and Development, which met in an open-ended session at United Nations Headquarters from 24 March to 1 April 1999, acted as the Preparatory Committee for the special session. The Committee had before it two information documents: "Review and appraisal of the progress made in achieving the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development" (E/CN.9/1999/PC/2); and "Report of the International Forum for the Operational Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development" (E/CN.9/1999/PC/3); and one document for consideration, "Proposals for key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development" (E/CN.9/1999/PC/4). This last-mentioned report served as the basis for formulating a document to be submitted to the special session. Although it reached agreement on a number of sections, the Preparatory Committee felt that more time was needed to

negotiate certain other sections. Hence, it agreed to meet for informal consultations at United Nations Headquarters from 5 to 7 May.

21. During those informal consultations, a number of paragraphs were adopted *ad referendum*. However, there were some problem issues — e.g., adolescents; family planning methods; abortion; resource mobilization — on which negotiations could not be completed. It was decided that the Preparatory Committee would meet again four days prior to the special session (24-25 and 28-29 June). When the Preparatory Committee ended on 29 June, several contentious paragraphs remained. The resolution of those paragraphs was left to the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

22. The Commission on Population and Development, acting as the Preparatory Committee, also considered arrangements for the accreditation of non-governmental organizations at the special session. Noting that, pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 52/188 of 18 December 1997 and 53/183 of 15 December 1998, the President of the Assembly was invited, in consultation with Member States, to propose appropriate modalities for the effective involvement of non-governmental organizations in the special session, the Commission decided to invite to the special session those non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and non-governmental organizations already accredited to the Conference and/or the Preparatory Committee. The Commission also decided that the accreditation of other interested non-governmental organizations, including those that had applied for consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, would be examined by a committee composed of the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee and the Secretariat by 14 May 1999. The Committee would make appropriate recommendations to the Preparatory Committee at its resumed session for a decision, provided that requests for accreditation were accompanied by information on the organization's competence and relevance to the subject of the special session.

B. Key actions

23. At the final plenary meeting, held late on 2 July, the 177 Member States participating in the special session adopted by consensus "Key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development" (A/S-21/5/Add.1). This comprehensive document, arrived at through lengthy negotiation, affirmed the Programme of Action and made a number of noteworthy advances. For example, it called attention to population and development concerns, noting the linkages between population, economic growth and environment. It recognized the implications of changing age structure and the ageing of the population, and underscored the urgent need for policies and programmes to deal with the causes of international migration, internal migration and urbanization, and the resultant dislocations. The special session called on Governments to ensure that the human rights of women and girls, particularly the freedom from coercion, discrimination and violence, including harmful practices and sexual exploitation, were respected, protected and promoted through the development, implementation and effective enforcement of gender-sensitive policies and legislation.

24. The special session called for intensified action in the following areas: reproductive and sexual health; maternal mortality; the reproductive health needs of adolescents; reducing abortion and addressing the health consequences of unsafe abortion; prevention of HIV/AIDS; gender issues and education. In several key areas, it recommended new benchmarks:

(a) The 1990 illiteracy rate for women and girls should be halved by 2005; and by 2010, the net primary school enrolment ratio for children of both sexes should be at least 90 per cent;

(b) By 2005, 60 per cent of primary health care and family planning facilities should offer the widest achievable range of safe and effective family planning methods, essential obstetric care, prevention and management of reproductive tract infections, including sexually transmitted diseases, and barrier methods to prevent infection; 80 per cent of facilities should offer such services by 2010, and all should do so by 2015;

(c) At least 40 per cent of all births should be assisted by skilled attendants where the maternal mortality rate is very high, and 80 per cent globally, by 2005; these figures should be 50 and 85 per cent, respectively, by 2010; and 60 and 90 per cent by 2015;

(d) The gap between the proportion of individuals using contraceptives and the proportion expressing a desire to space or limit their families should be reduced by half by 2005, by 75 per cent by 2010, and by 100 per cent by 2015. Recruitment targets or quotas should not be used in attempting to reach this goal;

(e) To reduce vulnerability to HIV/AIDS infection, at least 90 per cent of young men and women, aged 15-24, should have access by 2005 to preventive methods — such as female and male condoms, voluntary testing, counselling,

and follow up, and at least 95 per cent by 2010. HIV infection rates in persons 15-24 years of age should be reduced by 25 per cent in the most affected countries by 2005 and by 25 per cent globally by 2010.

25. Recognizing that financial resources are critical to the achievement of the Conference goals and to reaching the more ambitious benchmarks, the special session urged developed countries to redouble their efforts to mobilize funds in accordance with the levels agreed to at Cairo. It called upon developing countries and countries with economies in transition to strengthen their commitment to attaining the Conference goals and to continue mobilizing domestic resources. The special session reiterated that the international community should provide the necessary financial and technical assistance to support developing countries and countries with economies in transition to implement the Programme of Action. It urged particular attention to countries in Africa and countries dealing with the consequences of emergency situations and financial crises. South/South cooperation and the 20/20 Initiative were cited as modalities for reaching population and social sector objectives.

IV. Next steps

26. The twenty-first special session of the General Assembly was widely regarded as a most successful endeavour. It demonstrated the effectiveness of the United Nations in building global consensus through open and inclusive discussion. It marked the culmination of five years of impressive progress in implementing the Cairo consensus on population as a development issue of concern to all countries. It was especially successful in effectively involving civil society groups, most notably in having three non-governmental organization representatives address the final plenary meeting.

27. The special session affirmed the commitments made in Cairo in 1994. The progress of the first five years provides an encouraging basis on which to build. Formidable challenges, however, still remain. Resource mobilization for population activities must be placed high on the global development agenda if the international community is fully to implement the Conference goals and objectives.

28. The report on key actions (A/S-21/5/Add.1) provides a practical guide for focusing and intensifying implementation efforts. At the end of October 1999, the Task Force on Basic Social Services for All (BSSA) will meet to discuss how best the United Nations agencies and organizations can continue effective collaboration, particularly at the country level, to promote the further implementation of the Programme of Action. The Task Force will also attempt to identify possible new indicators to correspond with the benchmarks agreed to at the special session and the updating of existing previously agreed indicators.

29. Over the next few years, there will be a number of special sessions of the General Assembly marking the fifth anniversaries of other major United Nations conferences and summits. Efforts are being made to work with the respective secretariats of those events to convey the "lessons learned" from the twenty-first special session. To that end, a briefing on organizational and substantive issues has already been held with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which is responsible for the twenty-second special session, for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (27-28 September 1999); the special session entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century" (5-9 June 2000); and the special session on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and further initiatives (26-30 June 1999). Also, a briefing on the twenty-first special session will be made to the Administrative Committee on Coordination at its second session (29-30 October 1999).

30. Attention should now turn to possible options to mark the tenth anniversary in 2004, of the adoption of the Programme of Action. The Bureau of the Commission on Population and Development at its 1999 inter-sessional meeting recommended that options for the 2004 event be discussed by the Commission at its thirty-third session.

Notes

[1] Argentina, Guatemala, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Nicaragua, Sudan.

[2] Australia, China, Egypt, Holy See, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jordan, Kuwait, Malta, Morocco, Qatar, Yemen, United Arab Emirates, United States of America.